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ABSTRACT

A discussion is presented on the psychological and physical nature and origin of stress, changes in life stages that individuals make in response to events, and situations in life that create pressure and tension. This discussion is followed by examples of how to deal with stress through awareness of: communication skills: coping techniques, both physical and psychological, which will aid in prevention: and management and alleviation of stress. Four basic approaches to coping with stress are outlined: (1) reorganize life management and control styles: (2) manage the work environment by controlling its surroundings: (3) change attitudes toward the stressors in life: and (4) build up physical and psychological strengths and endurance. (JD)

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STRESS MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOL PERSONNEL

Stress is one of the most common problems, one of the commonest conditions that effects all of us at all stages of development. About 82 percent of adult Americans at times feel that they are under too much stress to function properly. Severe stress undermines the achievement of occupational and personal goals. A certain amount of stress, however, is necessary to motivate school personnel in reaching their goals.

We find that the modern manner of living and the climate in many of our schools has created a stress epidemic. Surplus stress burdens teachers, administrators and staff with fatigue, headaches, indigestion, and a host of other ailments.

Under the tensions generated by the demands of today's classrooms and schools, educators find it difficult if not impossible to accomplish tasks in a way that meets their own personal standards. The anxiety created by the often unreasonable demands of the position creates dissatisfaction with self. This adds to the stress impact (Miller, 1979).

In order to provide information on stress management, we will discuss the psychological and physical nature and origin of stress along with changes in life stages we make in response to events and situations in life that create pressure and tension. This will be followed by a discussion of how to deal with stress through awareness of communication skills, coping and techniques, both physical and psychological, which will aid in prevention, management and alleviation of stress.

Before we can learn to manage stress in our work situation it is necessary to have a clear understanding and awareness that we suffer from stress in all areas of life. Increasing our knowledge of the areas aforementioned will enable us to lead a more productive personal as well as professional life.

What is stress? Stress is your body's physical, mental and chemical reaction to circumstances that frighten, excite, confuse and endanger or irritate you. Stress is not necessarily something to avoid due to the fact that it is an integral

component of much of the activity, achievement, joy and meaning in life. We are faced with the challenge to develop those insights and skills and to order our lives so as to minimize the destructive effects of stress while engaging in a full range of important activities and experiences. "Stress is the spice of life," says Hans Selye. "Complete freedom from stress," Selye points out, "is death " (Selye, 1974).

Increasing awareness of your body physically and psychologically will enable you to identify areas where you feel tension, such as: neck, lower back, arms, head and knees. Identification of tension areas enables us to elleviate the pressure through sense relaxation techniques such as yoga, breathing, stretching and a variety of exercises which engage the body in releasing tension and bringing about a relaxed state (Bernard, Gunther 1976). It is important to educate children as well as adults to distinguish between a tense and relaxed body.

Disciplines suchas yoga provide a system of exercises, body control, and relaxation which varies from simple stretching exercises to elaborate highly disciplined forms of mind-body control (Richard Hiltlemon 1969). A relaxed body will provide the individual with the energy both physically and mentally to adapt to stressfull situations. The energy is vital in maintaining a feeling of self confidence which is vital to the development of a healthy concept of self; however, successfully dealing with stress is not only engaging in tension reduction, we also need to come to terms with ourselves.

Individuals who have a strong positive sense of self are able to adapt to life in a much more productive way. We must each feel we are the most important person in our lives. It is important to prize, accept and trust ourselves (Rogers, 1965). To insure our continued existence and comfort is to learn to live in ways that are not disturbing to our bodies. Hans Selye states that we must know how to live and practice what he calls altruitic egoism (Being good to yourself) (Selye, 1974). A strong healthy concept of self, and a warm feeling toward one's self is essential in adapting to stressful events. People who like themselves are less likely to get caught up in non-productive management of stress. They will be able to make the best out of negative situations, and feel encouraged to accept challenging situations which involve stress, knowing they will be capable of handling whatever comes about (Miller, 1970).

An accurate knowledge of self can be indispensable for the enjoyment of living (Twerski 1978). Having a strong sense of self means that you will be concerned and conscientious about meeting your needs first so that you in turn will be able to give more of your energy, time and effort to others. Most people put others and their needs first. This causes stress due to the fact their needs often go unmet. Often they provide for others and demand little for themselves until they feel they have given more than they can give and they feel frustrated and resentful. They also allow others to govern their behavior with their demands and expectations, which is detrimental to the growth of a healthy self concept.

Individuals must take time from their lives, both personal and professional, for themselves. Time to do things they want to do physically and mentally to alleviate pressures and provide them with time to analyze whether they truly are getting the most out of what they are doing. Fatigue, pressure, inadequate diet, fear of rejection, and lack of feelings of acceptance drain energy from the developing self concept.

Maslow states that when an individual's basic needs, physical (sleep, food) and psychological needs (love, acceptance) are not met the individual will have problems in adjusting. Their energy will be spent trying to meet those needs and they will have little energy left over to deal effectively with stress. Each person is unique and valuable. These feelings must be felt in order for the person truly to discover and experience his or her potentials in both personal and work experiences. People need to feel they are accepted for themselves, that they are competent and have something to offer to those they work and live with. Meeting needs provides a feeling of confidence that enables the individual to identify the origins and courses of stress. There are different types of stress which fall along two dimensions, self-imposed and situational. Self-imposed stress stems from unrealistic expectations we put on ourselves. Dr. Joseph F. Montague, who has spent 50 years researching and writing about nervous tension, says "I've never known a person who suffered from overwork. My patients suffer from overtrying - from having unrealistic expectations of what they can or should accomplish." This is especially true in education with so many students who need help and where pressures, repsponsibilities, and expectations are so high (Miller, 1979).

Many times educators feel that because they are in this position they should know all the answers and model exemplary behavior at all times. This type of thinking is unrealistic, because educators are human and not perfect. It is difficult to accept the fact that there are limits to what the schools and we personally can achieve. People in education expend a great deal of energy and time and often times their contributions are not formally appreciated. Contacts with others often result in troublesome interpersonal relations - this type of experience which makes an individual feel disliked or even physically attacked. It is probable that the individual will also feel under stress (Miller, 1979).

A great deal of self-imposed stress can be eliminated and prevented through increased awareness and setting realistic expectations. But, situational stress is stress coming from outside the individual, stress from the environment, government, society or culture. In many instances we do not have control over the actual situations, such as the price of oil and food, pollution, but we do have control over how we respond to the situation. We can respond either productively or non-productively (Miller, 1979). Our ability to accept what we cannot change and work on situations which can change, in our job, home and social interactions can be controlled.

Almost daily, educators and school personnel are victims of situational stress, usually resulting from factors over which they have little or no control. Declining enrollments inevitably result in some teachers, administrators and staff members being reassigned or released. Implementing programs that are mandated by legislation or by the courts, such as mainstreaming and desegregation, is another souce of upset. The increased emphasis on accountability and evaluatic of both students and teachers adds to the current climate of tension in schools (Miller, 1979).

Job related situational stress is a major factor in human unhappiness in all fields, not just education. A study conducted by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health looked at occupations that produced the most emotional stress. The common factor in the major high stress jobs was "being put in contact with the public in situations over which (the employees) had litt control." Many individuals in the field of education find themselves in this situation (Miller, 1979). This is evident in that the reactions of many

educators

working in "pressure cooker" schools has been to take all available sick leave, to retire from teaching early or to collapse at the end of the school day in order to gather enough energy to face the next day. This is not only true of teachers, but also administrators and staff members (Miller, 1979).

Knowledge of the origins of stress will provide accurate information which will determine the causes of a stressful situation. The causes of stress are called stressors or stressful events. When a stressor affects us negatively, we call it distress. Yet stressors are not necessarily bad, many of the good things of life are also stress (Selye calls this positive stress eutress). An argument with a friend or co-worker is a stressor but so is passionate love making (Selye, 1974) (McQuale Alkmon, 1974).

Physical stressors are such things as inadequate diet, fatigue, overwork. If these are not corrected or eliminated they can lead to serious physical problems. Coronary artery disease, hypertension, strokes, migraine headaches, ulcers, muscular and locomotor distress are some problems related to inadequate adjustment to stress or excessive tension (Anderson, 1978). According to Hans Selye 95% of all diseases known to man are due to faulty adaption to stress. Every person's capacity to adjust, adapt, is limited by the opportunities he has to change the environment by his physical and emotional make up (Selye, 1974).

Stressors are not only physical but also psychological. Some examples are frustration, external and internal, conflict and pressure, inner and outer demands. Frustration results when some obstacle blocks our progress towards a desired goal or the meeting of a need. External frustration comes from phsyical and social obstacles which are external to us (Wolf, 1968). Internal frustration comes from within ourselves, personal limitations, lack of knowledge of a skill. Conflict results when the choosing of one alternative means being frustrated in another one or more alternatives. A great amount of stress can be generated by merely anticipating a conflict situation or by the interpretation of the event. Pressures are experienced as "a bearing down or squeezing force" of a psychological nature which infringes upon an individual. We are faced with pressures from whithin, which stem from our own levels of aspiration and self ideal, and outer demands which come from the environment. In addition to the above mentioned sources, any type of danger threat to our physical or psychological existence will arouse feelings of fear and anxiety. Emotional common sense is necessary to anticipate, adapt and prevent psychological stress (Newburg, 1974).

Increased awareness of the distinction between feelings of anxiety and depression which accompany stressful situations will prevent an over reaction to the stressful event. Anxiety and depression are signs to us that some event or something is impinging upon us either positively or negatively. Feelings of anxiety are normal, helpful responses to stressful or threatening situations. When we are faced with some type of conflict between what we want and should do, our bodies send out signals that indicate we are anxious. Body signals such as butterflies in the stomach, sweaty palms, change in breathing, etc. are indications of anxiety. Prolonged anxiety can lead to serious physical problems such as ulcers, high blood pressure and inability to enjoy life. Depression is "the sad blue feeling" which stems from a type of disappointment, not meeting up to expectations and frustration. Holidays often cause feelings of depression due to the loss of loved ones, childhood memories and higher expectations. Frustration sometimes comes from not being able to achieve goals in one's job after much energy has been invested. Fatigue, sleeplessness, lack of interest, inability to concentrate, and boredom are body signals of depression. Prolonged depression will bring about isolation and serious emotional problems which need to be referred to professional help. Awareness of how you react to anxiety and depression will provide you with a sense of direction in working through the feelings. It is important to deal directly with these feelings instead of ignoring or denying them. Through this, we learn more about ourselves and our strengths and weaknesses. (Lazarus, 1966).

Once we have increased our awareness of types, identification and origins of stress, then analyzed the feelings which accompany stress, it is time to examine the resources we have available or that need to be established in order to manage effectively the stress in our lives. It is necessary to depend on others in the form of support systems when dealing with stress. Support systems are vital in every aspect of our lives - work, personal and social. A support system consists of people we can turn to when we are vulnerable. It is important to have individuals that can provide several types of support. Comforter is a name for someone to whom we can turn who fully accepts us as we are. We also need to cultivate individuals who will clarify, probe issues, and help us to explore and define our problems. Another important role in the support system is that of confronter. This individual will force us to focus on issues or behaviors we may not be aware of or may not wish to face. It is difficult to expect one person to fulfill all of these roles. It is important to include people who handle the above roles with honesty and ease. (Miller, 1979).

Support systems are necessary in every aspect of the educational system. Children need to cultivate individuals who can help them to deal with stressful situations inside and outside of the classroom. Teachers need to have a sense of support from their administrators and co-workers. It is vital in dealing with pressures in the classroom working with children, frustrations with the system and feelings of inadequacy in meeting the demands of the profession and lack of free time for themselves. Administrators have a need for support systems which include members of the staff and co-workers in order to deal effectively with the responsibilities of the position. Staff members need support systems in order to work efficiently at their jobs and to feel that people will help them when they are under pressure.

Knowing that people do change behavior and patterns with age and experience will help us understand our actions when under pressure.

Being able to turn to people for support is beneficial in examining information relating to behavior patterns we exhibit and the amount of space needed when we are under stress. Spend time to become more aware of the people you live and work with, and observe patterns of behavior they exhibit when they are under pressure. Take into account the amount of space they need in dealing with stress, for example, time away from people to cool off, someone close and holding them, setting limits, opportunities to talk it out.

Awareness of these two aspects of behavior will provide us with information that will be helpful in eliminating and preventing stress in the classroom between co-workers and among the staff. Providing "time out" places where individuals can go to think and calm down is essential. Teachers can utilize space in their rooms which is comfortable and safe to deal with stressful situations. Lounges in buildings available to school personnel are needed. (Wolf, 1969).

The behavior we exhibit when under pressure stems from the models provided for us from significant others in our lives such as parents, teachers and friends. Knowledge of past and present modeling of productive and non-productive coping skills is valuable in modifying present behavior.

You're tired and your head is in your hand, a child asks what's wrong and you reply "nothing, leave me alone." The child will imitate this

behavior when he is under pressure. Individuals respond to the modeling they received as children and carry this over in their reactions to stress. Setting positive examples such as taking time to talk, involvement in exercise or activity will provide those around you with positive alternatives to choose from when they themselves respond to sress.

Knowing that people do change behavior patterns with age and experience will help us understand our actions when under pressure. Physical, social and psychological development models of children developed by Gesell and Erickson provides to those working with children information about specific types of behavior children exhibit which can be labeled stressful. Learning to walk and talk, potty traning are examples of stressful experiences for small children. The development of relationships with peers, competition, fear of the dark and of dying are causes of stress in the stage of middle childhood. Physical changes, self identity, being accepted, independence are problems which face the adolescent. Adults also go through specific crisis periods in their lives such as the trying 20's: choosing a career, choosing a mate, marriage and establishing a family. With each level of development for the adult there are crises such as: change of life, children leaving home, retirement and old age. Being informed about these periods of change and the crises that accompany them can help ease the transition and avoid stress for those involved with the individual (Sheehy, 1976).

Along with healthy changes in development, we should increase our awareness and sensitivity concerning events in our lives which have been or could be seen as stressful events. Dr. Thomas H. Holmes, a psychologist, and his colleagues at the University of Washington School of Medicine have developed a "life events scale" designed to measure the psychological stress that can be caused by various changes and events in life's circumstances. Events such as marriage, death of a spouse and moving all give life change units. Studies by Dr. Holmes indicate that an accumulation of 200 or more "life change units in a single year may be more disruptive than an individual can withstand and make him vulnerable to illness (Holes, Thomas, and Rake R., 1967). Not all of the events are negative in the conventional sense, Dr. Hans Selye states that it is immaterial whether the agent or stimulus we face is pleasant or unpleasant, all that counts is the intensity of the demand for adaptation. (Anderson, 1978).

Being able to communicate our feelings about events that cause change and bring about stress is vital to healthy adaption. Communication is the most essential ingredient in successfully dealing with stress. Often we play games with each other to avoid confrontation, due to our fear of being rejected or laughed at. This fear is carried out by taking responsibility for other people's feelings. We feel guilty and responsible for the grief and problems of others (Ellis, 1971). We avoid confronting people, i.e. "Dan is an ineffective teacher but I'm not going to tell him because I am afraid it will hurt his feelings." When we make statements such as this we are taking responsibility away from Dan in dealing with what we have to say. We do not have the right to do this. This does not provide the individual with honest, constructive feedback. Providing open, honest and productive feedback is essential in communication. We learn who we are and how our behavior effects others. If what we tell others is incorrect then we describe an inaccurate image for them. This inaccurate information which could lead to a distorted self image is detrimental to emotional development (Twerski, 1978). We have a responsibility to ourselves and to others to provide accurate information about how other people's behavior, positive and negative affects us.

It is essential to provide children with experiences in clear, honest communication at an early age. This type of communication comes about through the types of messages we use in communicating. It is necessary to be aware of "You" messages vs. "I" messages. You messages are destructive, they attack the individual's self esteem. "You give me a headache," "It is all your fault for what you have done to me," If it weren't for you my life would be much happier." You messages put the responsibility for our behavior on the other person. I messages are straight, direct and give accurate feedback. They are risky because we are not certain how the individual will interpret our message or what consequences we will have to face as the result of our message (Gordon, 1971). But, they allow for growth for both individuals involved.

I language objectively describes the other person's behavior or the situation that interferes with you. It describes how the other person's behavior or the situation that interferes with you. It describes how the other person's behavior or the situation concretely affects your life. I messages describe your own feeling, and also describes what you want the other person to do, for example, provide an explanation, change behavior, apologize or offer suggestions

for solving the problem. I messages, can be stated: I want, I feel, a combination of mixed feelings, empathic assertion, (concern about how the individual will intrepret your message), and confrontation. I messages also separate the individual from the behavior, this separation is vital to reducing unnecessary stress and tension and keeps the individuals self esteem in tact (Jakuboueski, 1978).

Improving communication skills is necessary in learning how to cope effectively with stressful situations. Hans Selye states "A person who copes is a person who has developed skills which enable him to retain his own identity in a society fighting to endure." (Selye, 1956). When one stops, analyzes and says "Is this really the best thing I can do now and is it worth the trouble of putting up resistance against it, i.e. being stressed over being bored, angry, etc. (Lazarus, 1966). We all use productive and non-productive coping skills. Non-productive skills are ways to deal with stress which may reduce the stress, but actually do harm to the body, such as smoking and excessive drinking. Productive coping skills are those which reduce the tension and provide positive feelings, such as physical and mental exercise, music, hobbies and time to yourself (White, 1976). Coping skills vary with the individual's age, situation, (family, personal, etc.), marital status, background and experience. Each of us is capable of modifying our life style by modifying the skills we use to cope. Along with positive relazation, exercise, improvement in communication skills, it is necessary to feel stronger about decisions making and problem solving skills.

Stress analysis worksheets provide us with an objective outlook at the stressful situation. We are better able to come up with more alternatives to the problem by tracing back to what preceeded the stressful event, awareness of physical and psychological signs, types of coping skills utilized, communication used, identification of barriers and the desired outcome.

Once you have analyzed a problem share it with someone from your support system and ask them for feedback. Once you have analyzed the stressful problem, take time to develop a creative plan for coping with stress. Many of us are unaware of the actual resources, physical and mental that we already have going for us. Take time to take stock of your resources, family, work, religious beliefs. Include your strengths, and areas of weakness that you would like to work on. State alternatives you have already tried and the results. Try to understand why

they didn't work and add any suggestions for the future. Check your attitude toward life and how you feel about it. If you feel it needs some work spend some time on ways to improve it.

Design a specific step-by-step plan of action, provide yourself with reinforcement, and keep the plan flexible. Keep in mind that there are four Basic approaches to coping which you can depend on:

1. You can reorganize yourself and have more control over the way you manage your life.
2. You can manage your environment by controlling what and who is surrounding you.
3. You are capable of changing your attitude toward the stressors which impinge on your life.
4. You can build up your own physical and psychological strengths and endurance (Ietbising, 1979).

Being in control of your life comes about when you truly understand what is happening to you and what you are able to do about it.

Along with the knowledge about your creative abilities to cope it is also necessary for you to be able to identify and understand coping skills used by men and women in order to better understand the interaction which takes place. Adapting and reinforcing coping skills which have been traditionally male and female will strengthen the sensitivity men and women have for each other. Men feel more comfortable sharing and showing their feelings in the presence of people they trust, both male and female. Females feel more comfortable asserting and expressing their feelings in more overt ways.

Sensitivity to ways in which people cope is important as well as sensitivity to the ways in which we individually cope. Capitalizing on the importance of a fit, healthy mind and body is a necessary coping strategy. Taking time for yourself is a must every day. You are important enough and you deserve it (Cooper, 1912). There are a variety of methods you can use to relax and keep your body fit. Awareness of diet and the types of food we eat is essential to coping. If we eat junk food, we will feel junky. Certain foods and drinks can cause stressful

reactions, i.e., sugar, caffeine, too much fat in our diet (Thaddeus, 1976). Exercise - the proper kind and the correct amount - is vital to improving the circulation and keeping the body healthy and responsive. There are a variety of exercises available. Meditation, yoga, aerobic, imagery provide the body with an increase in mental and physical energy. Proper exercise lowers the blood pressure, increases the capacity to think clearly and provides a sense of well being.

Control of our bodies is vital to our sense of being. We also need to be able to control our bodies in time of stress. Dr. Charles Stroebel (1979) introduced and developed the Quieting Response (reflex), a physiological coping mechanisim which reverses the emergency flight - fright reaction we experience when we are under stress. During the six seconds it takes to occur, our heart rate quickens, our breathing changes, our hands become sweaty and clammy and we feel tense all over. The quieting response is a reversal of this condition. The individual takes a long, deep breath in through imaginary holes in the feet, fills up the body, up to the jaw, drops the jaw, pulls the air down slowly, lowering the shoulders, and out through the holes in the feet, taking with it the tension. This reverses the change of heart rate, quiets breathing, brings a feeling of warmth to the extremities, and provides a feeling of relaxation. The individual is able to respond in a clear thinking manner to the stressful situation. The QR provides an assurance of the inherent ability to manage both positive and negative stress through body awareness. This technique has proven successful for adults and is now being taught to children from age 3 and up. It is being used successfully in school systems to reduce stress between administrators and teachers, teachers and children. Children learn control and responsibility of their own bodies. Their self concepts are strengthened and they have more confidence in approaching both stressful situations and higher achievements.

Reassurance of the ability to manage stress is important to us, but when we are faced with situations where we are unsure of what to do, and all that we tried fails, it is necessary for us to seek professional help, through social, psychological or mental health services. We need to be aware of the resources available not only for our own needs, but also for those we work and live with. Often we do not know what to say when people are experiencing extreme stress such as grief over a death. It is important to use non-verbal messages as well as verbal

such as taking the person's hand, putting your arms around the individual and letting them know you care and are able to provide your strength. (White, 1976).

Awareness of what stress is, where it comes from and what it can do, both positively and negatively, is essential in adapting to pressure from life. Understanding ourselves, our strengths and weakness will provide us with the skills we need to have to cope with the pressures. Developing new and productive coping skills will give us the confidence that we are okay and we can take control of our lives, both at home and at work. Through our communication we can improve the environment and build a strong base of trust which will prove invaluable in dealing with stress.

Factors causing stress in our school systems will always be with us. Failing to meet this challenge can have a detrimental effect on our health and will reduce the effectiveness of the education we provide. (Miller, 1979). Stress is the spice of life - don't abuse it - learn how to use it.

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